

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, You are always with us when we are awake and asleep, when we do our work and when we rest, when we remember You and when our minds are filled with a thousand thoughts. Be so close to us that even when we are not directly aware of You, our thoughts, words and deeds reflect our walk with You. Permeate our lives, and perfect us by Your grace. Thank You Lord Jesus, AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Reflect on your health, and spend time both giving thanks to God for the correct and proper working of your body, and also seeking His healing power to deal with it's problems

On-going prayers

- **Pray for the ministry of God's people on TV:** Pray for musicians and performers who sing God's praise and project an image of worship and praise through the medium of TV
- Give thanks for the blessing of communication, and the ability we have to get in touch with people across the world.
- Pray for the victims of crime, especially those that have been in the news recently

Meditation

You know everything about all things, O Lord;
and yet You give Your attention to me.

You hear the sounds of the Universe, O Lord;
and yet You listen to what I say.

You are truth and justice personified, O Lord;
and yet You save me from my sin.

You create new things each day, O Lord;
and yet You rejoice in all I do.

You speak Your Word to the Universe, O Lord;
and yet You whisper in my ear.

So forgive me when I am selfish, O Lord,
and fail to give of myself to You.

Bible passage - Ezekiel 2:1-7

¹ He said to me:

'O mortal, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you.'

² And when he spoke to me, a spirit entered into me and set me on my feet; and I heard Him speaking to me. ³ He said to me,

'Mortal, I am sending you to the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have transgressed against me to this very day. ⁴ The descendants are impudent and stubborn. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them,

"Thus says the Lord GOD."

⁵ Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them.

⁶ And you, O mortal, do not be afraid of them, and do not be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns surround you and you live among scorpions; do not be afraid of their words, and do not be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house. ⁷ You shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear; for they are a rebellious house.'

Bible Study

Review

After Ezekiel's arresting vision of the glory of God (1:4-28), the Lord God spoke to him again, commissioning him as a prophet. Ezekiel was a priest of Israel who had been taken to Babylon from Jerusalem with the Exiles. In these circumstances, he and all God's people in exile struggled to understand what was happening to them. They had been brought up to believe that God dwelt in glory within the Temple of Jerusalem, but the Babylonians had destroyed the Temple and removed them from the holy city. So Ezekiel's vision was startling, for here was God, not fixed in Jerusalem, but moving across the world and coming to meet His people!

The vision comes to a climax with the sound of a voice speaking from the midst of the splendour, but although Ezekiel falls to the ground in proper respect and awe (1:28), our reading begins with the voice of God telling him to stand up! God had not given a vision of His glory just to reduce the young priest Ezekiel to awe. He had something to say, and wished to speak to him, so He said, '*stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you!*' (2:1).

Here, and throughout the prophecy of Ezekiel, everything moves quickly. God gave Ezekiel no time to stand back and think about what he had heard or seen, and God did not give him the luxury of time for an argument about his calling or a discussion about the prophetic message he would bear, as He did for Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3)!

When God spoke, Ezekiel was obedient and stood up, and this quick response was what the Lord was seeking. For as the first few chapters of Ezekiel make clear, the Lord needed a servant who would do exactly what He said, without question and without delay. God's people were in dire straits and there was no time for prevarication or dispute.

As soon as Ezekiel stood up, he reports that '*a spirit entered into me ...*' (2:2). Christians today might assume that Ezekiel is referring to God's spirit, and although they may be partially right, they should be careful. A reader today must understand this from the perspective of the Old Testament. God was calling Ezekiel to be a prophet, so we should best think of this spirit as a classic 'spirit of prophecy'.

Now at this point in time, God did not reveal a special prophetic message to Ezekiel. Clearly, God spoke damningly of His people Israel as a '*rebellious house*' (2:3,5,6), but the only part of today's passage that appears to be like a prophetic message is found in verse 5; '*whether they hear or refuse to hear ... they shall know that there has been a prophet among them*'. God wanted His people to know that He was active and working in their midst, and this was therefore an important message. Many of them had given up hope that God had any interest left in Israel.

God's long term plan was undoubtedly to be gracious to His people and give them every opportunity to respond to Him in obedience and love, however, nothing would work if they did not face up to reality. The reason they found themselves in exile in Babylon was because they had failed to honour their covenant with God. Generation after generation of Judeans and Israelites had preferred to manage the national life of God's people their own way, and the result was apostasy (the constant theme of both 2 Kings and also 2 Chronicles). Their religion bound them together as a nation but it had long since ceased to honour God as He commanded and required. As we might say today, they had the 'form of religion and not its power' (to quote John Wesley).

It was past history, written in detail within Scripture, that led God to describe His own people, even in the midst of their distress, as a '*rebellious people*' (2:3,5,6) and as '*impudent and stubborn*' (2:4). The sins of the past were an impediment to the people's relationship with God, not the fact that they were no longer in Jerusalem (as the people believed). So the Lord intended to do something about this, and He would have to deal with them with 'tough love'. He needed to say things to them that they would not want to hear, and although the people were hurting as a nation, they needed to hear the truth if they were to survive and fulfil their historic commission. Hence God's need for a prophet.

The Lord warned Ezekiel in the strongest possible terms not to be afraid of the people (2:6). Of course, the Lord knew what lay ahead and was protecting His prophet. Tomorrow we will read more about God's call to Ezekiel, though we will still not find much about a message. The scene is being set for the story of a remarkable prophetic work of God through the prophet Ezekiel, one that would transform the nation of Israel as she sought to return home and try once again to be obedient to her God.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Discuss in your group whether God gives Ezekiel any hint of a message for the people of Israel, and if so, what is it?
2. Is it fair of God to 'hijack' someone in this way to be His prophet? Do such things happen today?
3. If Israel was a 'rebellious house', can this same description be placed at the door of any part of the church today? Is this fair, given that we now live in New Testament times?

Personal comments by author

I have always found that I see parallels between God's people of ancient times and God's people today. I know full well that we now live in New Testament times and that the church today is different from the Old Testament people of Israel. However, people still behave in the same ways, and the lessons of the Old Testament are still applicable to God's people today when they indulge in apostasy and rebellion. We are all too capable of it! Note that in the Old Testament as today, God never stops loving His people, and neither should we.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *What kind of disobedience and rebelliousness do you perceive within God's people today, and what should be done about this? Do your best to talk about this with someone else, perhaps someone who worships at your church.*
- *Pray for all those who are burdened to be prophets today. Pray for the church, that it will hear what the Lord wishes to say to it.*

Final Prayer

You have spoken to Your people throughout history, Lord God, and sometimes You have been able to be kind and compassionate, and at other times You have had to be hard and demanding. Come amongst Your people today in all truth and tell us what we need to hear, so that we may be better servants of Yours both now and in the future. AMEN
